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NATO TRANSFORMATION: GIVING THE OLD ALLIANCE NEW TEETH

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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Abstract

Designed originally as a defensive alliance against a Communist threat, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) military forces have sought a unified mission since the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990's. The military effectiveness of the Alliance is inextricably tied to the political will of its member states. Despite recent political tensions, NATO members have agreed to embark on a course of transformation to build the military capability necessary to deal with global threats to the Alliance.

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Introduction

Designed originally as a defensive alliance against a Communist threat, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) military forces have sought a unified mission since the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990's. In April, 2003 U.S. Marine Corps General James Jones, Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR) stated, "It is fair to say that NATO is at a crossroads...between the 20th century and the 21st century [where] the threats are not as clearly defined. NATO is in need of some...transformation."¹ The military effectiveness of the Alliance is inextricably tied to the political will of its member states. In view of highly publicized political differences between some NATO member nations and the current U.S. Administration over Operation Iraqi Freedom, can NATO maintain its relevance in a post-Cold War world? The political question is beyond the scope of this paper. Despite recent political tensions, NATO members have agreed to embark on a course of transformation to build the military capability necessary to deal with global threats to the Alliance.

Under the guidance of Allied Command Transformation, NATO is currently realigning to more closely integrate with the U.S. Department of Defense's (DOD) own transformation. NATO's transformation includes a global reach capability to address worldwide threats. NATO's military transformation will allow its multinational forces to deploy quickly and effectively using doctrine and hardware familiar to American Joint Force (JTF) Commanders. Continuing transformation of NATO, with its adjunct Partnership for Peace member states, will promote global stability through collective security and robust military interoperability.

By analyzing the capability objectives of NATO's transformation, this paper will show that NATO remains a significant and viable collective security alliance that can address emerging global security issues as a competent multinational force. First it will examine how NATO's mission has evolved throughout its history. It will outline how transformational changes in headquarters and force structure will affect NATO's mission, area of operations and capabilities. It will analyze how NATO's transformation will affect the continued military relevance of the Alliance. Finally it will address the ability of American Combined Forces Commanders to integrate with NATO forces.

NATO's Evolving Military Mission

There existed a very real threat of Communist expansion in Western Europe following World War II. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania had declared independence from the Soviet Union during the war. The Soviet Union re-annexed these three Baltic States in 1945. Soviet leader Josef Stalin ordered the blockade of the combined U.S. and U.K. sectors of Berlin in 1948, validating U.S. and Western European suspicion of his intentions. The Soviet blockade resulted in the famed Berlin Airlift to re-supply Allied forces.

To counter this perceived Communist threat, NATO was formed in 1949 as a collective defense agreement between North America and Western Europe. The North Atlantic Treaty's intent was to provide North American military assistance to Western Europe in case of Soviet attack.² At the heart of NATO is Article 5 of the Treaty, which considers an attack on any one member as an attack on all, to be met with the collective military might of the Alliance.³ The original signatories to the treaty were Belgium, Britain, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway,

Portugal and the United States. Greece and Turkey were admitted to the Alliance in 1952 as part of the Truman Doctrine which sought to protect democratic countries from Communist conquest. West Germany was added in 1955, although with restrictions on her military and Spain was admitted in 1982.

The Soviets responded in kind by forming their own collective defense alliance, the Warsaw Pact, in 1955. The two superpower led alliances defined the bipolar security situation that became the Cold War.

For the 42 years between 1949 and 1991, NATO's Cold War military mission was to deter and, if necessary, defeat a Soviet led attack in Central Europe. Europe rebuilt itself after the devastation of World War II under the security umbrella of NATO. If the two superpower alliances did go to war, NATO commanders expected to fight a land war in Europe with heavily mechanized forces already in place. With the U.S. providing the majority of troops and weapons systems to the alliance, NATO forces adopted American military doctrine.

In the late 1980's the Soviet Union instituted a series of economic and political reforms under Mikhail Gorbachev. Reform spread quickly to the Soviet satellite states and in July 1991 the Warsaw Pact was officially disbanded.⁴ Unexpectedly without its traditional opponent, the NATO mission needed revision. The Alliance's mission focus shifted from the Warsaw Pact to ensuring a stable Europe after the fall of communism. NATO closely monitored the fragmented former Soviet Union and its satellite states, assessing the evolving European security situation.

The new NATO mission of European stability was first tested in the former Republic of Yugoslavia. NATO's 1993 and 1999 interventions in the Balkans marked a

new era for the alliance. Yugoslavia was not a NATO member, so there was no Article 5 defensive requirement to enact. At the same time, many NATO nations were attempting to curb state expenditures by drawing down their militaries. Encouraged by the success of coalition air operations in Iraq during the 1991 Gulf War, NATO leaders embraced air power as a means to quickly check Serbian aggression. Air power was seen as a cost effective, low risk method to influence a less capable opponent. Air strikes offered speed and accuracy against Serbian targets. NATO air bases were already within range of targets in Yugoslavia. Compared to placing large ground combat elements in contact with the enemy, air operations minimized the scale of friendly troop deployments and risk of losses.

In Bosnia, NATO acted on behalf of the United Nations and in its own interest of a stable Europe. The Alliance mission evolved from enforcing the U.N. no-fly zone beginning in 1993 (which prevented Serbian military aircraft from supporting Bosnian Serb militias) to U.N. approved air strikes on Bosnian Serb targets by 1995. After the war ended in 1995 with the Dayton Peace Accord, NATO formed the multinational Implementation Force (IFOR) to keep the peace in Bosnia.

In 1999, NATO members determined that the growing humanitarian disaster in the Yugoslav province of Kosovo was a direct threat to European security. Dealing with renegade provinces of their own, Russia, China and India thwarted attempts to secure U.N. approval for action against the Serb forces in Kosovo.⁵ Despite the lack of a U.N. mandate, in March 1999 NATO initiated air strikes against Serb forces in Kosovo. Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic complied with NATO demands after three months of NATO strikes. After adoption of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1244 on 10 June

1999, Kosovo was placed under international control and NATO assumed control of Kosovo Force (KFOR) to maintain peace.⁶

The terror attacks of September 11, 2001 triggered NATO's Article 5 collective defense clause for the first time in history. NATO AWACS aircraft supplemented American forces over the continental U.S. While not begun as a NATO operation, most of NATO's member nations supplied forces to oust the Taliban regime in Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom. Pointing to its peace keeping successes in the Balkans, in August, 2003 NATO assumed control of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan.⁷ NATO currently has over 8,000 troops deployed in support of ISAF.

NATO's current mission statement was approved in 1999 at a conference in Washington D.C. by the participating NATO Heads of State and Government and remains applicable today. In addition to the three "essential purposes" of Security, Consultation, and Deterrence/Defense, its mission also includes:

- “• Crisis Management: To stand ready, case by case and by consensus...to contribute to effective conflict prevention and to engage actively in crisis management, including crisis response operations.

- Partnership: To promote wide ranging partnership, cooperation, and dialogue with other countries in the Euro-Atlantic area, with the aim of increasing transparency, mutual confidence and the capacity for joint action with the alliance.”⁸

Crisis management and partnership are the basis of NATO's ongoing transformation and the key to its continued relevance in the 21st Century.

NATO and Transformation

Following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks it became apparent that NATO's tanks, aircraft and nuclear arsenal were relatively useless against such an unconventional and asymmetric threat. Despite the invocation of NATO's Article 5 and the internationally recognized link between the terrorist attacks and Taliban support of Al Qaeda, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) was not a NATO operation. OEF planning happened so quickly that some NATO members could not react fast enough to participate in combat operations.⁹ This acknowledged inability of the Alliance to respond quickly to an external threat as a unified force is the basis for NATO formalizing its transformation process.

“Transformation isn't necessarily just about change. It's about transforming the processes by which we implement that change,” explains U.S. Navy Captain Steve Litwiller, NATO Allied Command Transformation Operational Concept Development Branch head.¹⁰ In a major streamlining of its command and control (C2) NATO has restructured and reduced headquarters. To more closely integrate the Alliance's military elements NATO converted its Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic headquarters in Norfolk, Virginia into Allied Command Transformation (ACT). ACT is charged with developing NATO doctrine and capabilities requirements. U.S. Navy Admiral Edmund Giambastiani is currently dual hatted as Supreme Allied Commander Transformation and commander of U.S. Joint Forces Command (JFCOM). JFCOM performs the same functions as ACT for the U.S. military's own transformation. ACT and JFCOM were purposely established in geographic proximity to each other and share a common commander to ensure the current and future interoperability of Alliance and U.S. forces.

In addition to its military makeover, NATO has transformed itself politically. NATO introduced the “Partnership for Peace” (PFP) in 1994. PFP exists to promote greater European stability by allowing non-NATO countries to have limited participation in NATO activities. PFP countries may participate in NATO planning, exercises and operations in order to encourage interoperability and transparency of military intentions.

¹¹ Thirty countries have joined PFP since its inception, many of them former Warsaw Pact members. Ten PFP members, including former Warsaw Pact signatories Bulgaria, Poland and Romania, have become full NATO members.¹² This political transformation has direct military benefits in the global war on terrorism. According to Estonian Foreign Minister Toomas Henrik Ilves, “NATO membership now becomes as much about intelligence operations, information sharing, interdiction of money laundering, visa regimes, and non-proliferation activities to stop the spread of weapons of mass destruction into the hands of terrorists and regimes which support them.”¹³

Headquarters Transformation

In a 2003 interview, Major General James L. Jones, SACEUR, stated, “There will be a major re-orientation of the NATO command and control structure [based] primarily on military, and not political, utility.”¹⁴ During the Cold War, NATO’s highest headquarters structure was built to command predetermined forces and split areas of responsibility into Europe (SACEUR) and Atlantic (SACLANT). The Cold War command and control structure resulted in inefficient duplication of staff efforts. NATO members have agreed to cut established headquarters nearly in half and have reduced from a total of 20 to 11 in order to streamline staff functions.

The new NATO command structure mirrors U.S. joint command structure and doctrine. ACT (formerly SACLANT) is now responsible for doctrine, standardization and experimentation and is the functional parallel of U.S. JFCOM. Allied Command Operations (ACO) is responsible for short term operational requirements and functions, operating much as a U.S. regional Combatant Commander (COCOM). ACO is co-located and subordinate to Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE). Lower echelon NATO headquarters will command joint task forces such as the NATO Response Force, which will be discussed later. Some Allied headquarters will assume specialized functions such as special forces or transportation, similar to U.S. Specified Commands.¹⁵

NATO Capabilities

The future effectiveness of NATO's military depends on its ability to achieve unity of effort. ACT will guide the NATO transformation to achieve that unity as the Alliance expands to include new members and extends its military reach globally. At a November 2002 summit in Prague, NATO members acknowledged that the Alliance's military structure suffered from excessive and inflexible Cold War era infrastructure, too many troops, and equipment designed for traditional 20th Century defense and warfare.¹⁶ Participants at the Prague summit also agreed to a commitment to improve NATO's interoperability with the more technologically capable U.S. military.¹⁷ This pledge is known as the Prague Capabilities Commitment (PCC).

The PCC is a focused program to improve 400 specific shortcomings in NATO's military ability. These shortcomings include "deployability, sustainability, interoperability, information superiority, and chemical/biological/radiological/nuclear

defense (CBRN).”¹⁸ An example of an interoperability issue hampering the combat effectiveness of the Alliance became apparent during Operation Allied Force, the NATO operation in Kosovo. According to government and industry reports, 200 allied refueling aircraft were used during the operation when only a few dozen could have performed the same task if Allied fighter aircraft shared common aerial refueling equipment.¹⁹

NATO members have agreed to share the cost of modernization by investing in niche capabilities for their militaries that contribute to the Alliance’s overall effort. Based on the requirements identified by the PCC these NATO members have agreed to the following specialties:

- Germany will lease C-17 transport aircraft from the U.S. and lead a group of nations to pool airlift capabilities;
- Canada, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Turkey will buy unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV);
- Spain and the Netherlands are buying Suppression of Enemy Air Defense (SEAD) weapons;
- The Netherlands is leading a consortium of 5 countries to purchase precision munitions;
- Norway and Germany will improve maritime mine countermeasures;
- Poland and Hungary are committed to improving CBRN capabilities.²⁰

NATO Response Force

To project credible power globally NATO needed a highly agile, flexible and interoperable force. To meet this need, NATO created the NATO Response Force. NATO defines the NRF as “...a coherent, high readiness, joint, multinational force

package, technologically advanced, flexible, deployable, interoperable and sustainable.”²¹

The NRF provides a joint force with fully integrated air, land, and sea components under one commander that can deploy where needed to perform a variety of missions. The NRF falls under the operational command of ACO, with doctrine being developed by ACT acting on lessons learned from the NRF forces. The missions that the NRF will perform are yet to be determined. Some examples of potential missions are non-combatant evacuation operations, humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping and counter-terrorism.²² The NRF could also provide an initial forcible entry capability for follow on forces. The NRF concept is truly transformational for NATO which has traditionally not combined forces from different members and service components.

When ordered, the NRF will deploy within 5 days and will be self-sustainable for 30 days. When fully operational, NRF tactical air elements will be able to generate 200 sorties per day.²³ The NRF achieved initial operational capability in October, 2004 and will reach full operational capability with about 21,000 troops in 2006.

The concept behind the NRF is to have member nations contribute forces to continually rotating elements. These elements rotate as follows:

- 1) Member nation assigned forces form a joint force and undergo a six month training period working towards certification as operationally proficient.
- 2) The certified element enters a six month period where they are available to the NRF commander for operational tasking as needed.
- 3) Following the six month operational availability, the element forces are stood down and assigned back to their home nation's command to await their next scheduled NRF training/certification period.

Each NRF element has identical capabilities, but because their training and operational availability phases are staggered, they will provide a continuous force capability to the NRF commander without any single force required to be continually on alert. Each element is based on a brigade size land force with special operations capability, and has a naval task force assigned to support if needed. Based on mission requirements only parts of an element may deploy, or, if needed, all or part of separate components may combine.

Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, USAF General Richard Myers offers this example of how the NRF may be employed: "...an example would be the Olympics in Athens. They need a certain capability the military has. It might be the NATO Response Force would provide those. It certainly wouldn't be the whole Response Force. You don't need a bunch of infantry battalions, but you might need some of the capability – their chemical, biological...contamination for instance.”²⁴

Will NATO Remain Relevant?

Transformation of NATO to a more streamlined force with global reach is in the interest of its members' security. As stated in the April 1999 NATO Strategic Concept, "Any armed attack on the territory of the Allies, from whatever direction, would be covered by Articles 5 and 6 of the Washington Treaty. However, Alliance security must also take account of the global context. Alliance security interests can be affected by other risks of a wider nature, including acts of terrorism, sabotage and organized crime, and by the disruption of the flow of vital resources.”²⁵ A 2001 Rand Corporation study concluded that "NATO's emphasis on collective and cooperative security is the core of its continued relevance in contemporary Europe.”²⁶ The primary challenge to this

relevance is the requirement for 26 NATO member nations to agree with and continue supporting the expensive transformation process.

NATO has committed to acquiring the proper capabilities to deal with emerging threats. Former NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson notes, “When I took my post as Secretary General, I said that I had three priorities: capabilities, capabilities, capabilities.”²⁷ The NATO modernization program agreed to in the Prague Capabilities Commitment will provide the Alliance with global power projection and interoperability well into the 21st Century. The investment in hardware that creates niche capabilities in member militaries benefits the Alliance in aggregate. By agreeing to rely on each other for security, members prove their political commitment to collective security.

The most important aspect of NATO’s transformation has been the formation of the NATO Response Force. With the ACO as a modernized and efficient operational chain of command the NRF is a capable force that will be able to respond quickly in support of a variety of Alliance missions. ACT will ensure that the NRF remains a credible force by ensuring interoperability and germane doctrine. In U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld’s words, the NRF will provide “...committed forces that were known in advance, trained and ready and equipped to do a series of tasks that could be...modular, put together, mix and match depending on the crisis. It could range all the way from peaceful humanitarian type of systems to full-fledged combat.”²⁸ Secretary Rumsfeld further commented “First of all, it’s [NATO is] going to have to use its response force or it will atrophy.”²⁹

The NRF will continue to evolve and NATO officials have identified crucial capability shortfalls including strategic airlift, communications, and logistics systems.

ACT has implemented experimental programs to address these issues including deploying 33 NATO Friendly Force Tracker test units to ISAF in Afghanistan. The NATO Friendly Force Tracker is a scaled down version of the U.S. Army's Force XXI Battle Command Brigade and Below (FBCB2) tracking and messaging system.³⁰

Taking command of ISAF in Afghanistan demonstrates NATO's global responsibility. At a 2004 NATO capabilities summit, NATO's Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer stated "Afghanistan is NATO's number one priority. That is a major obligation the Alliance has entered into. I want to see that political commitment with the Alliance has entered into completely and fully translated into the military resources."³¹

There still exist political differences between the United States and some NATO members over the decision to invade Iraq in March 2003. Some have argued that the U.S. decision to lead an ad hoc "coalition of the willing" in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) demonstrates that an alliance such as NATO no longer serves a function. It could also be argued that NATO creates an unnecessary dependence of member nations on the United States. Both arguments fail to take into account NATO's stated purpose to provide for the collective security for its members. Several NATO members participated in OIF. The operation's military success is at least partly due to the relationships and interoperability cultivated by those NATO members. NATO offers stability and transparency of intent to its members and their Partnership for Peace associates. Rather than creating dependence on the U.S., NATO's continuing military transformation is building interoperable capabilities and efficiency into Alliance militaries. Most importantly, as evidenced by the September 11 terrorist attacks, Article 5 is as relevant today as it was when the treaty was first signed.

NATO's transformation is a combination of military and political evolution. The Partnership for Peace has created a zone of security in Eastern Europe by fostering cooperation with non-NATO nations and helped former Warsaw Pact nations with needed political and military reforms. Including PFP countries in NATO exercises provides Alliance members with additional resources that are familiar and at least somewhat interoperable in the event of a crisis. There are PFP countries that remain authoritarian dictatorships whose strides towards democracy are halting. However, due to the realities of the global security situation the interests of the Alliance should not preclude their participation.

NATO, Transformation and the American Commander

Transformation will modernize the traditional relationship between NATO and U.S. military forces. NATO's continuing transformation will produce forces and equipment that are highly interoperable with those of an American Task Force Commander's. This relationship will improve speed and efficiency by greatly simplifying coordination required in coalition operations. The future of NATO-U.S. interoperability is supported by ACT and JFCOM developing capabilities in tandem.

The NATO Response Force will be able to provide deterrent or, if necessary, combat capabilities in crises where Alliance interests are at stake, but American forces do not or can not deploy. The NRF is perfectly suited to seamlessly assume peace keeping duties from an American Joint Task Force because of the developed interoperability of command and control. For the same reasons, an American JTF could quickly augment the NRF if a situation shows signs of exceeding NRF capabilities.

The success of such combined operations hinges on NATO forces training and operating with American forces. Continuing to share ideas and education through NATO and U.S. officer exchanges is crucial to support for and success of interoperability.

Conclusion

American President George W. Bush commented, “The Soviet Union is gone, but freedom still has enemies. We’re threatened by terrorism; bred within failed states, it’s present within our own cities. We’re threatened by the spread of chemical and biological and nuclear weapons, which are produced by outlaw regimes and could be delivered either by missile or terrorist cell.”³²

Today’s major emerging security threat to both Europe, North America and, in fact, the world is an unconventional and asymmetric attack by a terror organization or rogue state. NATO member nations have committed to transforming the Alliance’s military capabilities to react quickly, effectively and globally to this threat. Investment in interoperability and interdependence of NATO military hardware and doctrine will provide a credible military force with long term cost efficiencies. American Joint Force Commanders will be able to coordinate and combine with other NATO forces because of integration at Allied Command Transformation and U.S. Joint Forces Command. Concerns about political differences between member nations are being downplayed following recent meetings between U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and other Alliance member diplomats. Perhaps of greater significance is that, despite political differences, NATO’s military innovation, collaboration, and integration has continued to proceed. In their essay on the future of NATO, U.S. Rep. Doug Bereuter (R-NE) and John Lis comment, “The reality is that NATO is not a cold war institution in search of a

mission to keep it alive, but remains an indispensable tool for the democracies of the Euro-Atlantic region to ensure their security against common threats.”³³

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